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IMPLICATIONS OF STALIN'S COLLAPSE

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Stalin's illness and imminent death removes from the Soviet scene the most important single element in the Soviet-Communist system. The remaining Soviet leaders consequently face a tremendous readjustment problem.

The Soviet system is such that solution of this problem will necessarily present grave difficulties and will almost certainly produce intra-leadership intrigues. It cannot be assumed, however, that these intrigues will lead to any serious weakening of the regime or to significant changes in Soviet foreign or domestic policies. In fact the necessity of displaying to the world a smooth transition to a new leadership would seem to require a continuance of previous policies. The 1952 Party Congress and Stalin's October Bolshevik article, together with the ideological lines laid down in the current vigilance drive, appear to have set a course which the leadership that replaces Stalin would find most difficult to alter.

Attack Appears Fatal. The nature of Moscow's announcement of Stalin's illness indicated belief on the part of Soviet leaders that there is little chance of recovery and that to all intents and purposes he has been eliminated as the controlling force in the USSR. While the communique spoke of the "temporary withdrawal" of Stalin and anticipated only his "more or less prolonged non-participation in

leading activity," it pointedly emphasized that medical treatment so far applied has failed to bring about any improvement and described the nature of the affliction in such a way as to suggest a fatal attack. Similarly, the announcement's concluding appeal to the Soviet people was in terms that indicated an intention to prepare the country psychologically for a new leadership.

The framers of the announcement also appeared concerned to quiet any speculation that Stalin's illness might have been the result of any sort of "plot." Treatment of Stalin, it was said, "is conducted under the constant supervision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Government." It would seem, therefore, that the leaders are anxious to avoid a suggestion that Stalin's illness is connected with the "doctors' conspiracy" announced last January 13.

Collapse a Surprise. Stalin's collapse came after several months of exceptional personal activity on his part. Last autumn, in contrast to previous postwar years, he remained in Moscow for the 19th Party Congress, rather than going to Sochi in the Caucasus. He made at least two personal appearances at the Congress, delivering a public speech at the closing session, his first since 1946. He attended the November celebration of the anniversary of the Revolution, an occasion that he had frequently missed in the past. Since the beginning of the new year, he has had at least four interviews with foreigners and has attended the Bolshoi theatre. This unusual personal activity in recent months strongly suggests that his collapse came without warning.

The removal of Stalin from control presents the Soviet Union with a most serious problem of leadership. On the basis of all the evidence available it appears that he retained in his own hands and actively exercised absolute authority over the whole of the Soviet power system, including the Soviet Party, the Soviet Government, the European satellites, and the world Communist movement. Any expectation that after the war Stalin would gradually relinquish active direction of affairs and withdraw to an elder statesman status ware not realized. In fact he did not even revert to his prewar practice of controlling the regime from a Party post without heading the government.

Stalin apparently continued until at least a short time ago to concern himself with detailed operations of the Soviet power system to as great an extent as any time in the past. This was directly evidenced in the fields of foreign affairs, Party affairs, control of the satellites, ideology, and direction of the world Communist movement. It was indirectly evidenced in the military, economic, security, and propaganda fields.

Succession Unclear. So far there has been no hint who is to take over Stalin's role. The official announcement threw no light on the subject. It merely placed responsibility on the entire Central Committee of the Party and the Council of Ministers, saying that "in guiding the Party and the country, the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers with full seriousness take into account all circumstances connected with the temporary withdrawal of Comrade Stalin from leading the State's and Party activity."

The problem of replacing Stalin is, of course, made more complex by the fact that Stalin's role was a symbolic one as well as a real one. No one can possibly assume at any early date this symbolic position, for whatever may have taken place with respect to preparations for an actual transfer of power, no preparations at all have been made for any of Stalin's associates assuming Stalin's "great father" mantle.

Even with respect to actual power, it cannot be assumed that any arrangements have been made for a changeover. Insofar as intelligence indications exist, there are none that suggest that a successor has already been chosen.

This, of course, raises two questions. Will there be a struggle for power between opposing individuals or factions? Who are the likely candidates for Stalin's mantle? It is conceivable that removal of Stalin from the controls will unleash a bitter struggle for power. This could happen if the present leadership has been split into opposing groups or if individuals jockeying for power back up their pretensions with organized support. Difficulties inside the ruling group since the end of World War II have been made evident, in the alleged murder of Zhdanov, a leading candidate for Stalin's favor, in the oblivion accorded Voznesenski, for years the principal Soviet planner, and in the variety of difficulties created for Andreyev, Khrushchev and Kosygin.

Despite these manifestations of disharmony it appears at present that there will not be a struggle for the succession of a nature to disrupt the regime. It appears, in particular, that the inner group

of the Presidium (the former Politburo) is not organized and is unlikely to become organized into hostile factions divided on policy and bent on exterminating the others. Stalin has had a long time to select, train and test his close associates, and the inner group has shown considerable stability over time. It would seem probable, however, that any lingering by Stalin, as Lenin lingered, in the wings of the stage would give more opportunity for a struggle to develop than a prompt exit.

New Head to Council Needed. Stalin built his power on the base of a position from which he could control the Party apparatus, and has built into the Soviet power structure the principle of Party supremacy. Nevertheless, he has since 1941 held the key post in the government apparatus, as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. The latter post is the only one held by Stalin that requires a more or less immediate successor. Whoever is to be selected will be chosen by the Central Committee and formally named by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. At the present time Stalin holds no position in the Party which is formally unique, that is, he shares membership with others on the Presidium of the Central Committee and on the Secretariat. He has been described as Secretary-General of the Party in the postwar period, but not since the Nineteenth Party Congress. In the listings that resulted from the Congress Stalin's name unalphabetically led all the rest, but no special post was assigned.

One possibility, therefore, is that a new government chieftain would be named, without any rearrangements of Party posts. A strong

case could be made for the restoration of Molotov to the government post of chairman of the Council of Ministers which he held throughout the 1930's, when Stalin wielded power from his Party Secretaryship. If so, it would give Molotov a definite advantage. However, even if Molotov became Premier and the Central Committee made no change in the Presidium and the Secretariat, this would appear likely to rebound to Malenkov's favor since with Stalin out, Malenkov would be the only likely candidate for Stalin's post who held a position in both the Presidium and Secretariat. Malenkov would be in a position, therefore, to control the Party machinery which in the long run will probably prove supreme.

Control by a triumvirate or similar small group is possible, but the Party chieftain under such an arrangement would almost automatically come to occupy the first place, although his power and prerogatives might not be as large and unchallenged as those of Stalin.

No Policy Change Foreseen. Stalin's elmination will probably bring no early change in Soviet domestic or foreign policy. Domestically it can be expected that tight controls will continue to be maintained over all segments of the population. Controls probably will even be strengthened in accord with the development of the "vigilance" campaign which was intensified after the exposure of the "doctor's plot" on January 13. The governmental regulations and doctrines enunciated by Stalin or in his name will probably become for at least a period sacrosanct with all elements vying with each other in their professed adherence to them. For the time being it is unlikely

that any new doctrines will be enunciated. The goals set by the new plan for 1955 will continue to serve as objectives. The emphasis will remain on developing heavy and armament industry and continuing to increase the proportion of communal production in agriculture.

In the realm of foreign policy it would appear that Stalin and the Party Congress laid out lines of policy to which the Soviet Government can be expected to adhere for some time. Vis-a-vis the West, this policy is clearly one of unremitting hostility. The official Soviet theoretical journal Kommunist late in January backed up by an important Pravda editorial on February 6 made clear that this signified no "concessions not even small concessions" to the "imperialists." In practical terms, this would appear to mean a continued "hard" Soviet policy on Korea, Germany, and all other outstanding issues between East and West.

Stalin's demise should have no appreciable effect in the immediate future on the Soviet Union's relations with its satellites, with Communist China and with the international Communist movement. Operational relationships and policies have long since been evolved, in the case of international Communism at the Soviet Party Congress, in the case of Communist China at the 1952 talks with top Chinese officials. In the long run, however, the problem of replacing Stalin as the unquestioned leader of the World Communist movement may present difficulties, particularly with the Chinese Party.

With respect to policy toward the West, there have been reports of divergent opinions among Stalin's possible successors regarding

policy but these are purely speculative. Even if any of Stalin's associates have privately advocated policies different from Stalin's, they probably would be loathe to assume the risks of opening themselves to charges of deviationism by publicly advocating a change, particularly in view of the fact that Stalin has just completed drafting what in effect amounts to a blue print on the direction of basic Soviet domestic and foreign policies. In other words, the policy positions taken by Stalin will tend to be frozen for a more or less prolonged period with no one Soviet leader strong enough, or daring enough, to attempt changes.